

Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the matter of)
Requirements for Digital) ET Docket No. 05-24
Television Receiving Capability)

To the Commission:

Comments of Nickolaus E. Leggett

The following are formal comments from Nickolaus E. Leggett on the Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. I am a certified electronics technician (ISCET and NARTE), a licensed Extra Class amateur radio operator (call sign N3NL), and a licensed private pilot. I am also an inventor holding three U.S. patents. I have a Masters degree in Political Science from the Johns Hopkins University.

My comments are focused on the impacts of digital television broadcasting on low income American citizens.

The Impact of Broadcast Television on Society

Broadcast television is not just a profitable business. Broadcast television serves to unite Americans of diverse backgrounds in a common experience. All Americans see major sporting events such as National Football League games. Americans of diverse backgrounds see the national news broadcasts. Children of all economic classes grow up aware of a broader world around them. Americans see political events.

Removing the Poor from Society

We must work to make sure that lower income and poor Americans are not shut out of the television experience by the planned conversion to digital over-the-air broadcasting. The planned conversion will shut down the existing analog television broadcasting over the air. This action will make millions of analog television receivers obsolete.

This single step will annoy many Americans, and it will have a large impact on the poor. Most poor people watch older televisions or new small-screen televisions and they will not be able to afford to buy a new digital TV. This negative impact is increased because the digital televisions are more expensive than analog televisions.

People will have the option of buying a set top box that converts the incoming digital signal into an analog signal for an analog TV set. This set top box is an additional cost that many low income and poor households cannot afford.

The many poor people who are cut off from the American television experience will drift away from the American culture and become more open to divisive social and political views. It will be hard for them to see themselves as part of America when television broadcasting is reserved only for those with better incomes. These poor people number in the millions and are an important political factor.

Protecting the Poor in the Digital Conversion

Quite frankly, if I had been on the Commission I would not have voted for the mandatory conversion to digital television broadcasting. Digital broadcasting simply does not offer enough benefits to outweigh its major social costs.

However, since we are well down this road to digital broadcasting, we must act to protect the poor and the basic community of America.

In Paragraph 22 (on Page 10), the Commission asks if new receivers with screens smaller than 13 inches be required to have digital television (DTV) tuners. The answer clearly is **yes** because only digital TV signals will be broadcast after the conversion date. So the cheap analog TVs will become rather useless. This is a loss to society because the cheap TV has been a major instrument for integration of American society over the years.

We can compensate for this loss by suspending the mandatory conversion to digital broadcasting until basic digital television receivers are conveniently available in the retail marketplace. These simple small-screen DTVs should be priced at or below \$150 in 2005 dollars.

Similarly, the mandatory conversion to digital broadcasting should be suspended until set top boxes converting digital to analog are available at a retail place at or below \$50. If this protective step is not taken, there will be an intense political uproar when the analog TV sets go dark. I have many non-poor friends and family who will scream at their Senators when this “conversion” happens. I will probably call my own Senators as well (Senators

Warner and Allen of Virginia). The poor will be especially hard hit because even a capped price of \$50 dollars is a significant amount for them to pay.

It is important to remember that the set top box does not improve the performance of your analog television. It merely is a technology that allows the analog television to continue operating in a new regulatory environment. As such, the set top box is a tax imposed for the right to continue to keep using your analog TV.

A Conversion Alternative

There is an alternative to having a mandatory day when the analog signals go off and only digital television is available. This alternative is to leave the conversion to the marketplace itself.

Let the marketplace decide when television broadcasting converts from analog to digital mode. At the present time, many TV viewers are still using analog TV sets. However, this is likely to change as digital TV improves in quality and declines in cost.

This is an approach to technology that is supported by many conservatives and which should be appealing to the current administration.

If the conversion is left to the marketplace itself, the conversion will be slow and gradual and the poor will be able to easily adapt to it.

Recommended Actions

The following specific actions are recommended:

1. The mandatory conversion to DTV should be suspended until inexpensive digital television receivers are available at a retail price of \$150 or less.
2. The mandatory conversion to DTV should be suspended until set top boxes (digital to analog converters) are available at a retail price of \$50 or less.
3. Use of market mechanisms instead of a mandatory shut down for analog transmissions should be considered.

Respectfully submitted,

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June 16, 2005